Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-23 (canceled)

Claim 24 (new): A picture coding method including the steps of:

inputting moving picture data having an arbitrary frame rate that is not known in advance;

determining the input frame rate of the inputted moving picture data;

providing a target value for a buffer storage amount;

determining a buffer remaining amount of the coded picture data stored in a buffer and not yet outputted by the apparatus;

calculating a correction amount based on a difference of said target value and said buffer remaining amount; and

calculating a target code amount for use in said coding step by adding said correction amount to said reference target code amount, wherein said target code amount is based on said input frame rate.

Claim 25 (new): The method of claim 24, wherein said target value is based on said input frame rate.

Claim 26 (new): The method of claim 25, wherein said target code amount is also based upon a frame-skipping threshold value corresponding to a threshold value used to judge whether a next picture of the inputted moving picture data is coded.

Claim 27 (new): The method of claim 24 further comprising the steps of:

providing a reference coding frame rate based upon said input frame rate; and

calculating a reference target code amount using said reference coding frame rate, wherein said target code amount is determined based upon the reference target code amount.

Claim 28 (new): The method of claim 27, wherein said reference coding frame rate is determined based upon a maximum value of said input frame rate.

Claim 29 (new): The method of claim 27, wherein said reference coding frame rate is determined based upon an average value of said measured frame rates within a time interval.

Claim 30 (new): The method of claim 29, further comprising the step of updating said reference coding frame rate, wherein, when the reference coding frame rate before being updated is larger than the reference coding frame rate after being updated, a value between said reference coding frame rate before being updated and said reference coding frame rate after being updated is used as an updated reference coding frame rate.

Claim 31 (new): A picture coding method including the steps of:

inputting moving picture data having an arbitrary frame rate that is not known in advance;

determining the input frame rate of the inputted moving picture data;

providing a reference coding frame rate;

determining a reference target code amount using said reference coding frame rate;

providing a target value for a buffer storage amount;

determining a buffer remaining amount of the coded picture data stored in a buffer and not yet outputted by the apparatus;

calculating a correction amount based on a difference of said predetermined target value and said buffer remaining amount; and

calculating a target code amount for use in said coding step by adding said correction amount to said reference target code amount.

Claim 32 (new): The method of claim 31, wherein said target code amount is also calculated based upon a frame-skipping threshold value corresponding to a threshold value used to judge whether a next picture of the inputted moving picture data is coded.

Claim 33 (new): The method of claim 31, wherein said reference coding frame rate is determined based upon a maximum value of said input frame rate.

Claim 34 (new): The method of claim 31, wherein said reference coding frame rate is determined based upon an average value of said measured frame rates within a time interval.

Claim 35 (new): The method of claim 34, further comprising the step of updating said reference coding frame rate, wherein, when the reference coding frame rate before being updated is larger than the reference coding frame rate after being updated, a value between said reference coding frame rate before being updated and said reference coding frame rate after being updated is used as an updated reference coding frame rate.

Claim 36 (new): A picture coding method including the steps of:

inputting moving picture data having an arbitrary frame rate;

coding said moving picture data into coded picture data for storage in a buffer prior to outputting said coded picture data;

determining the input frame rate of the inputted moving picture data;

determining a reference coding frame rate using said input frame rate;

calculating a reference target code amount using said reference coding frame rate;

determining a target value for a buffer storage amount using said reference coding frame rate;

determining a buffer remaining amount of the coded picture data stored in the buffer and not yet outputted by the apparatus;

calculating a correction amount based on a difference of said predetermined target value and said buffer remaining amount; and

calculating a target code amount for use in said coding step by adding said correction amount to said reference target code amount, wherein

the code amount of the outputted coded picture data is approximated to said target code amount in said coding step.

Claim 37 (new): The method of claim 36, wherein said target code amount is also calculated based upon a frame-skipping threshold value corresponding to a threshold value used to judge whether a next picture of the inputted moving picture data is coded.

Claim 38 (new): The method of claim 36, wherein said reference coding frame rate is determined based upon a maximum value of said input frame rate.

Claim 39 (new): The method of claim 36, wherein said reference coding frame rate is determined based upon an average value of said measured frame rates within a time interval.

Claim 40 (new): The method of claim 39, further comprising the step of updating said reference coding frame rate, wherein, when the reference coding frame rate before being updated is larger than the reference coding frame rate after being updated, a value between said reference coding frame rate before being updated and said reference coding frame rate after being updated is used as an updated reference coding frame rate.

Claim 41 (new): A picture coding method including the steps of:

determining a reference coding frame rate using the input frame rate of inputted moving picture data;

calculating a reference target code amount using said reference coding frame rate;

determining a target value for a buffer storage amount using said reference coding frame rate;

determining a buffer remaining amount of the coded picture data stored in a buffer and not yet outputted by the apparatus;

calculating a correction amount based on a difference of said predetermined target value and said buffer remaining amount; and

calculating a target code amount for use in said coding step by adding said correction amount to said reference target code amount.

Claim 42 (new): The method of claim 41, wherein said target code amount is also calculated based upon a frame-skipping threshold value corresponding to a threshold value used to judge whether a next picture of the inputted moving picture data is coded.

Claim 43 (new): The method of claim 41, wherein said reference coding frame rate is determined based upon a maximum value of said input frame rate.

Claim 44 (new): The method of claim 41, wherein said reference coding frame rate is determined based upon an average value of said measured frame rates within a time interval.

Claim 45 (new): The method of claim 44, further comprising the step of updating said reference coding frame rate, wherein, when the reference coding frame rate

before being updated is larger than the reference coding frame rate after being updated, a value between said reference coding frame rate before being updated and said reference coding frame rate after being updated is used as the updated reference coding frame rate.